

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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P R 200915Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1523
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMCONSUL GOTEBORG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, FI
SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN LEAGUE NAMES PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

REF: (A) HELSINKI 1222, (B) HELSINKI 0957

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. IGNORING PRESSURE FROM CONSERVATIVE
AND CENTER PARTIES NOT TO OPPOSE PRESIDENT KEKKONEN'S
RE-ELECTION (REFTEL A), FINNISH CHRISTIAN LEAGUE (SKL)
CONGRESS, HELD JUNE 17-18 IN KOKKOLA, DECIDED BY OVER-
WHELMING MAJORITY (460-33 WITH 8 ABSTENSION) TO SELECT
ITS OWN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RATHER THAN BACK KEKKONEN
CANDIDACY. AFTER RESOLVING THAT ISSUE, SKL CONGRESS
PROCEEDED TO DECLARE PARTY CHAIRMAN RAINO WESTERHOLM
ITS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BY ACCLAMATION.

2. WESTERHOLM TOLD PRESS THAT MAIN PURPOSE OF HIS
CANDIDACY IS NOT TO WIN ELECTION--WHICH HE SAID SKL
RECOGNIZES IS NOT POSSIBLE--BUT RATHER TO AFFECT PUBLIC
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OPINION THROUGH HIS CANDIDACY. HE SAID SKL HAS NOTED
SECULARIZATION AND BREAKDOWN OF VALUES IN FINNISH
SOCIETY. HE TOLD PRESS "THE NATION DOES NOT HAVE AN
INNER SPIRIT. HISTORY DEMONSTRATES THAT NATIONS HAVE
BEEN EXTINGUISHED NOT BY A FOREIGN ENEMY BUT BY
INTERNAL DECAY. DURING KEKKONEN'S TIME THE ROAD OF
INTERNAL DECAY HAS BEEN FOLLOWED . . ." HE SAID,

CITING LAWS WEAKENING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, PERMITTING ABORTION AND FACILITATING THE SALE OF BEER. HE BELIEVES HIS CANDIDACY WILL OFFER A "CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE" TO FINNISH PEOPLE.

3. WHILE EXPRESSING ITS CONCERN OVER SUCH DOMESTIC TRENDS AND DECLARING ITS BELIEF THAT THE CONTINUING "POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT" IS NOT GOOD FOR THE COUNTRY, SKL AND ITS CANDIDATE MADE CLEAR THEY NOT OPPOSING PRESIDENT KEKKONEN ON FOREIGN POLICY. WESTERHOLM SAID HE CONSIDERS KEKKONEN FOREIGN POLICY "REALISTIC".

4. THOSE FEW SKL CONGRESS DELEGATES OPPOSING NAMING OF SKL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ARGUED (AMONG OTHER POINTS) THAT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IS ESSENTIALLY A FOREIGN POLICY QUESTION, AND THAT TO OPPOSE KEKKONEN IMPLIES DISAGREEMENT WITH FINNISH FOREIGN POLICY. THEY POINTED OUT THAT KEKKONEN'S CANDIDACY IS NOT A PARTISAN PARTY CANDIDACY BUT RATHER A GENERAL PEOPLES' CANDIDACY, AND SKL SHOULD NOT BE APART FROM THIS NATIONAL MOVEMENT. ONE SPEAKER ALLUDED TO THE RISK TO SKL'S POLITICAL FUTURE (REFTEL A) THAT PARTY WAS TAKING GIVEN OPPOSITION OF OTHER PARTIES TO SKL PUTTING UP ITS OWN CANDIDATE.

5. BOTH CONSERVATIVE ORIENTED NEWSPAPER UUSI SUOMI AND INDEPENDENT HELSINGEN SANOMAT GAVE PROMINENT COVERAGE TO SKL CONVENTION AND DECISION. EDITORIAL REACTION TO SKL DECISION HAS BEEN LIMITED THUS FAR TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HELSINGEN SANOMAT. HELSINGEN SANOMAT EDITORIAL PREDICTED THAT PARTY AND ITS CANDIDATE "WHO PREFERS TO SPEAK OF SIGNS FROM HEAVEN THAN OF SOCIETY'S PROBLEMS" WILL RECEIVE ONLY THE RELIGIOUS VOTE THAT IT SEEKS, UNLESS CONTINUING PRESSURE AGAINST THE NEW CANDIDATE "GIVES HIM A MARTYR'S CROWN". DESPITE ITS SOMEWHAT PATRONIZING TONE, HELSINGEN SANOMAT EDITORIAL DEFENDED SKL RIGHT TO NAME ITS OWN CANDIDATE AND CRITICIZED PRESSURE THAT HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO BEAR TO PREVENT IT FROM DOING SO.

6. DECISION OF SKL TO NAME WESTERHOLM ITS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RAISES TO THREE THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES OFFICIALLY DECLARED AS OPPOSING INCUMBENT PRESIDENT KEKKONEN: WESTERHOLM, AHTI SALONEN OF CONSTITUTIONALIST PARTY (REFTEL B) AND EINO HAIKALA OF UNITY PARTY (VEIKKO VENNAMO OF RURAL PARTY HAS NOT YET FORMALLY BEEN NAMED). END UNCLASSIFIED.

7. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. GEORG EHNRROOTH, CHAIRMAN OF CONSTITUTIONALIST PARTY TOLD POLCOUNS TWO WEEKS AGO THAT HE HAS BEEN GREATLY ENCOURAGED BY SIZE OF AUDIENCES TURNING OUT TO HEAR SALONEN'S SPEECHES; HE PREDICTED SALONEN ELECTORS WOULD RECEIVE PERHAPS 15 PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE IN JANUARY 1979 POPULAR VOTING TO CHOOSE ELECTORS AND EXPECTS THAT WESTERHOLM WOULD RECEIVE ANOTHER 5-10 PERCENT. HE SAID IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER VENNAMO WILL BE A CANDIDATE OR PERHAPS SUPPORT SALONEN. HAIKALA IS NOT TAKEN AT ALL SERIOUSLY.

8. HOWEVER, EHRENROOTH EXPRESSED HIS CONTINUING DOUBTS THAT ELECTIONS WILL IN FACT BE HELD; HE HAS LONG BELIEVED THAT SOME EXCUSE WILL BE FOUND TO AVOID HOLDING NORMAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. WESTERHOLM ALSO REMARKED INFORMALLY AT SKL CONVENTION THAT THERE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MAY STILL BE AN EXCEPTIONAL LAW TO EXTEND PRESIDENT KEKKONEN'S TERM OF OFFICE WITHOUT ELECTIONS, NOW THAT EFFORTS TO FORCE SKL OUT OF CAMPAIGN HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL. SEPTTEL THIS SUBJECT FOLLOWS.

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